

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS OF INFANTS AND TODDLERS

VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

Sight is used to regulate the other senses—a sighted child will see the object and reach out for it to explore it with their hands. A child with visual impairment will likely need the object placed in their hands to start this type of exploration and learning. A visually impaired child can learn what a sighted child learns, but they will learn it differently.

Many children have poor eyesight. For most, corrective lenses allow them to pick up a toy, focus on a caregiver's face, and process all visual stimuli in their nursery, daycare or at the playground. Only a small percentage of the population experiences visual impairments significant enough to put them at risk for development delays.

Screening and Assessment of Visual Impairments

Early vision screening and early detection of significant vision loss helps children receive intervention earlier—reducing developmental delays and occasionally limiting or preventing vision loss.

Possible signs of visual impairment:

- Red, irritated, teary or cloudy eyes
- Eyes are not aligned (turn in or out) or has jerky movement (nystagmus)
- Eyes do not appear to move together
- Eyelid(s) is drooping
- Rubs eye(s) frequently
- Squints, blinks, closes eye to look
- Looks away, shows gaze aversion
- Tilts or turns head to look at something

- Inattentive to a visual target unless it is accompanied by a corresponding sound cue
- Takes longer than usual to focus on an object or face
- Views objects at an unusually close distance from eyes
- Over or under reaches for an object

Even if no vision problem is suspected, young children should have their first comprehensive eye exam at about 6 months of age, with subsequent eye exams at their third birthday and then again prior to first grade, around 6 years of age. However, if an infant is displaying any signs of visual impairment, the child should be seen by an eye care specialist as soon as possible.

- A child suspected of having vision loss or impairment should first undergo a **Pediatric Ophthalmologic Evaluation (POE)** in order to get a diagnosis of eye health and vision.
- Once an infant or toddler has been diagnosed with a visual impairment, they should be referred to a Teacher of Children with Vision Impairments (TVI) who can complete a **Functional Vision Assessment (FVA)**. This assessment is done in a home or childcare facility, and determines what and how the child sees, and what can be done to best facilitate learning through the visual sense.
- Within a child's first 3 years, he or she should also undergo a **Learning Media**



This parent guide is based on the *Service Delivery Guidelines for Alaska: Visual Impairment*. The complete guidelines are available online at earlyintervention.alaska.gov

Assessment (LMA), which determines how a child learns through visual, tactile, auditory cues, etc. in order to determine how to achieve literacy.

- Children with vision impairment should also have an **Orientation and Mobility Evaluation** (OME), to identify strategies needed for their optimal development of environmental awareness and to promote independent, purposeful movement.

How Can EI/ILP Help?

Alaska's Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program (EI/ILP) offers support, assistance, and advice to families on how to best meet their child's unique needs, including access to a wide variety of information and resources.

EI/ILP supports a team approach for providing evidence-based, family centered services that take into account the child's and family's unique strengths and needs. Providing early intervention services within the child's natural environment and continuing to listen to the family throughout the process, intervention techniques can be designed and modified according to the child's and family's needs.

Who is Eligible for EI/ILP?

Not all visual conditions qualify a child for EI/ILP services. For example, eye muscle disorders such as strabismus, near-sightedness or far-sightedness that can be corrected by glasses, or vision impairment in one eye with normal vision in the other, do not in themselves require services.

However, other conditions which hinder development may establish eligibility for early intervention services. To find out if your child is eligible for early intervention services, contact the Alaska EI/ILP.

What Does Intervention for Infants and Toddlers Look Like?

- Qualified professionals conduct ongoing functional vision assessments, orientation and mobility evaluation, and early intervention.
- Infants and toddlers with vision impairments and their families receive specialized early intervention services integrated into an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) that promotes independence for the child within the context of family-centered, community-based activities.
- The IFSP team assists the family in learning about the nature of their child's vision impairment and its potential impact on their child's development.
- Parents and caregivers learn to acquire and manage assistive technology for their child.
- Parents are knowledgeable about their child's developmental needs and advocate effectively for their child. Parents understand their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C.

For More Information

Alaska Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program earlyintervention.alaska.org
(877) HSS-FMLY. (907) 269-8442. TT Relay (800) 770-TYPE

Alaska Blind Child Discovery (800) 270-1617. Local (907) 276-1617

National Association of Parents of the Visually Impaired www.napvi.org
(800) 562-6265

National Organization of Parents of Blind Children www.nfb.org/nfb/About_NOPBC.asp
(410) 659-9314